



Kate Edmundson
Interim Executive Director

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **August 21, 2006**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (No Quorum Established)

Ann E. Franzen
Helen A. Kleinberg
Daisy Ma
Sandra Rudnick
Adelina Sorkin
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Carol O. Biondi
Patricia Curry
Hon. Joyce Fahey
Susan F. Friedman
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Rev. Cecil L. Murray
Wendy L. Ramallo
Stacey F. Winkler

YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE

Jason Anderson

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Because of a lack of quorum, approval of the minutes of the August 7, 2006, general meeting was deferred.

CHAIR'S REPORT

- Chair Kleinberg introduced interim executive director Kate Edmundson, who will be in the Commission office on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, as well as on Monday mornings for Commission meetings. The office will continue to be staffed during the week by executive assistant Elizabeth Hinton.
- Commissioner Rudnick reported that the process for hiring a permanent executive director is underway, with the position bulletin having been recently released.
- Commissioner Ma announced the date for the Commission's retreat, which will take place on October 30 from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at The California Endowment's new building near Union Station. The structure for the retreat has not yet been decided, but the committee is hoping to meet toward the end of this week at the Endowment facility. Commissioner Ma thanked Commissioners Franzen and Sorkin for their ongoing help.
- Susan Jakubowski is returning as the Department of Children's Services liaison to the Commission, and expressed her pleasure at the assignment.
- This year's annual report to the Board of Supervisors, required by the Commission's creation ordinance, was begun by former executive director Dana Blackwell prior to her departure. The goal is to complete it by the end of September, and some Commissioners will be receiving copies of the draft with a request for input.
- All councils and commissions established by Los Angeles County are assigned a 'sunset date' by which they are reviewed to see if their work continues to be relevant and effective. If the Auditor-Controller's office, which conducts these reviews, ascertains that a recommendation for 'sunsetting' is appropriate, a body may be discontinued. The Commission's last sunset date was in October 2005, and the Auditor-Controller's office has recommended its continuance through 2011, a proposal that will go before the Board of Supervisors for approval soon. Commissioners will be notified of its agenda date.
- Several years ago, DCFS funded an arts program at Camp Rockey. Ilean Rabens from the Mental Health Commission is asking for help to reinstate this program. The Department of Mental Health has pledged \$50,000 toward the total cost of \$100,000, and DCFS, Probation, and the Department of Public Social Services are being asked to make up the balance. Vice Chair Sorkin passed program information on the program to Joan Smith for follow-up.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The IV-E waiver plan is in process, with the prevention work group having met last week and the other three work groups scheduled to meet today. (Commissioner Curry is planning to attend the permanency meeting.) All four groups will present their recommendations to community members and department managers during the morning session of an August 28 forum, with break-out sessions arranged for that afternoon to discuss them in

depth. A finalized document will be prepared early next month that will go to the Board of Supervisors the third week of September. Joan Smith, Acting Director, DCFS, stressed that the plan would be a 'point in time document,' subject to changes and adjustments by the planning group. The plan is tied to specific deliverables identified by Federal and state authorities, and work group activities were linked to those outcomes. Although the state is ultimately responsible for seeing that the deliverables are achieved, DCFS and Probation will be proactively measuring results.

The blending of other funds is also being discussed—such as those from the Mental Health Services Act and those earmarked for the Katie A. lawsuit settlement—and DCFS is looking to other departments for funding streams, using IV-E waiver dollars when existing sources are not available. Some MacLaren Children's Center dollars are still available for Katie A. requirements, and EPSDT funding is being maximized; the state is still deciding how to fund therapeutic foster care and wraparound. The local planning groups and regional offices consider permanency a high priority area, especially for children who have been in the system for a long time.

Good ideas have been generated that may not be specifically appropriate for the IV-E waiver plan, but should be pursued, and work group chairs should bring those ideas to DCFS on Wednesday for further discussion.

OVERVIEW OF SKID ROW PROJECT

Lari Sheehan from the Chief Administrative Office's Service Integration Branch reviewed the county's homeless initiatives, with a particular emphasis on homeless families with children. A team of county departments and agencies—including DCFS, the Departments of Public Social Services (DPSS), Mental Health (DMH), Health Services (DHS), newly created Public Health Department (DPH), the Sheriff, the Community Development Commission (the county's housing body), County Counsel, and others—have been studying homeless issues for some time.

In December 2004, the Board of Supervisors became interested in how county agencies plan for the discharge of persons under county care. In DHS, DCFS, and Probation, discharge planning is adequate, but the Sheriff's Department—which discharges as many as 600 individuals a night, some of whom are homeless—still needs to better integrate its community transition unit with other departments and with the nonprofit sector.

In April 2006, the Board considered a homeless prevention initiative requiring \$100 million in funding: \$15.4 million from the general fund for ongoing programs, \$80 million for one-time projects, and nearly \$5 million specifically for populations within DMH and DHS. Funding for the ongoing programs was approved in April and allocated to the county's budget in June, but the Board will consider the \$80 million Homeless and Housing Program again in September. This program is meant as a pilot to test different models for effectiveness; if it is successful, additional funding will be sought from the county and from other sources. Unfortunately, current restrictions on available Federal and state dollars are not helpful in getting people off the streets and into supportive services and housing.

Ongoing programs to be funded by the \$15.4 million include these:

- In partnership with the nonprofit Beyond Shelter, a Homeless Family Access Center will be established on the outskirts of downtown's Skid Row area, in keeping with the Board of Supervisors' zero-tolerance policy for families on Skid Row. Beyond Shelter will also be addressing the demand for temporary housing by reaching out to motel/hotel owners' and landlords' associations, and other sources.
- Through CalWORKs funding, the DPSS is contracting for two housing locators (one in SPA 4 and the other serving the remaining SPAs) to help negotiate leases, resolve landlord/tenant disputes, and be available to families for a six-month stretch as they settle in.
- A contract with SocialServe.com will create a countywide database that will collect an inventory of Section 8 and other housing for low-income families and singles (both market-rate units and emergency shelter beds) that may ultimately include a reservation component.

The \$80 million Homeless and Housing Program will include:

- A \$2 million contract with Beyond Shelter (working as a team with DCFS, DPSS, and DHS) to provide case management services to 500 families to get them into rehabilitation services, permanent housing, etc.
- Almost \$4 million in rental subsidies for 500 families, including 350 Section 8 vouchers (300 from the City of Los Angeles and 50 from the county's Community Development Commission), vouchers for extended-stay motels, and "shallow" two-year rental subsidies targeted to families who can most readily re-establish themselves financially
- Approximately \$3.5 million in moving assistance and rental subsidies for transition-age youth aging out of the dependency and delinquency systems who are not eligible for independent living program services because of their undocumented status or because they are probation youth emancipating from non-foster care situations

Despite the county's focus on prevention, a vicious cycle is often created when children are removed from their homes and parents therefore cease to qualify for family assistance, then cannot get their children back because they no longer have housing. Some housing and rental assistance programs address this, mostly through DPSS, and the Linkages program for families dually served by DPSS and DCFS—now active in two DCFS offices, with plans to expand—can track which families are about to lose their housing.

Roberta Medina reported that DPSS and DMH have been working on homeless issues since December 2004, and were joined in January 2005 by DCFS. Together with staff from the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, they form teams that do outreach on the streets to help families initiate the eligibility process for services, or find out why ser-

vices previously provided have not been successful. DCFS's priority is child safety, and staff members serve in teams—along with staff from DPSS, DMH, DHS, DPH, and DHS's alcohol and drug section—that assess each family to make sure that parents are able to secure their children's basic needs. These teams work Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and teams from the emergency command post work during evening hours. Initially, families were diverted to shelters like the Midnight Mission and the Union Rescue Mission, where DCFS staff are co-located, but now are generally given 14-day housing vouchers to transition them out of the Skid Row area without delay. If their assessments indicate a need for mental health or health services, they receive those at the nearby Eisner Clinic rather than at the medical hub at LAC+USC, which is farther away. Some children on Skid Row still attend school, and attempts are made to house their families near their original schools, sometimes with the help of the Los Angeles Unified School District's homeless liaisons.

The goal is to stabilize these families in a community setting, with no reversion to homelessness. Commissioner Ma asked what happens when the 14-day vouchers expire, and Ms. Medina said that on day 15, the family's need is assessed. Depending on the connections have been made in their area of origin, they may be eligible for a subsequent 120-day housing voucher. (Modifications in the rules are being considered to skip the 14-day voucher and make the 120-day voucher immediately available; these are one-time-only FEMA vouchers.) Finding enough housing inventory for an expanded program will be a challenge. Although Beyond Shelter has networks throughout the county, the Homeless and Housing Program will increase its historical demand of 150 or 200 apartments per year to 500.

Most families on Skid Row are there because of domestic violence, evictions, and evacuations; many have been there for years, but some have recently come from other counties or states. Many have never received public assistance—some do not meet CalWORKs criteria, and many are undocumented. Family size ranges from two or three children to as many as six, mostly with single mothers and a few single fathers. (In general, transition-age and runaway youth end up in the Hollywood area, rather than on Skid Row.) Mental health or substance abuse issues are the exception, not the rule. Of the 115 families seen from January through June of this year, only 30 percent needed a child abuse referral, and fewer than half of those ended with a child being detained. As with point of engagement (POE), DCFS links families to resources in the area, taking a comprehensive, multi-agency approach with voluntary family maintenance, family preservation, family support, and alternative response services, mostly through its SPA 4 Metro North office.

Without further changes in their lives, the chronically homeless are often not helped by simple vouchers. A program from Beyond Shelter wraps individuals with supportive services and provides housing where they can remain even when services cease. "Shelter care plus" offers subsidized housing along with programs in money management, etc., in which the family must participate to retain housing. Job training and employment skills are important components of any homeless initiative, whether provided through CalWORKs or outside the traditional system. To date, the need for alcohol and drug treat-

ment has been met with existing resources, but there will likely be capacity concerns as the number of participants increase. (A portion of the Beyond Shelter budget has been allocated for rehabilitation services.) Counseling for domestic violence victims is offered through the Department of Mental Health.

Ms. Sheehan's staff is working to ready the \$80 million Homeless and Housing Program plan to go before the Board in September so it can be incorporated into the supplemental changes to the county's 2006–2007 budget, along with funds for gap housing and rental subsidies for individuals not qualifying for Section 8 housing. The contract with Beyond Shelter also needs ratification by the Board; once it is approved and DCFS develops appropriate outcomes, Beyond Shelter will begin hiring staff for the project, which should be in full swing by January 2007. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the appropriate departments is in draft, with the role of the contractors still to be finalized.

In most cases, DPSS homeless case managers will take the lead with families 'on the ground,' following their benefits for 45 days and working through the assigned contractors. If an open child abuse case is involved, DCFS will take the lead. A team decision-making facilitator is being allocated to the project so that family sessions can devise child safety plans. In addition, a special software program will track participating families so that the project team can access and input information in a database developed by DCFS and added to by other departments. Keeping tabs on the location of homeless families is not easy, but team members have found that they are generally in touch with social workers for vouchers and other services.

Joan Smith recognized Ms. Sheehan's leadership in bringing the diverse group of departments together for this work, and also thanked Ms. Medina for an outstanding job.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

MEETING ADJOURNED